

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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THE RUTLAND FREE LIBRARY

100th Anniversary



Rutland Free Library

The Federal Building, built in 1858, was renovated and became the home of the Rutland Free Library in 1935.

THE RUTLAND FREE LIBRARY

By Dawn D. Hance

When Rutland was chosen as the new county seat in 1784 the transfer brought an influx of lawyers, court personnel and craftsmen into town. These men, some of whom had acquired a college degree, knew the benefits derived from a solid education and realized the importance of linking their rural New England lives with those of others through literature. Since it was expensive to own a large private library, some decided to band together and sell subscriptions to obtain the necessary funds for the purchase of books. These in turn were loaned out to the subscribers and general public.

In 1792 the noted magistrate Nathaniel Chipman proposed the formation of the Rutland Social Library, which would service persons living within six miles of the courthouse. He offered to donate between 80 and 100 volumes and by March 1794 the number had grown to 161 books on hand. An annual subscription sold for four dollars. The society lasted until, at least, 1841.

The earliest indication that the West Parish had a library was in 1795 when the Reverend Lemuel Haynes, the well-known mulatto minister, announced that the drawing of the West Rutland Library would be held at his home. Haynes, who lived on Pleasant Street, listed himself as the librarian. Since he had a sizable collection of books when he died, some of which were presented to the Rutland Historical Society a few years ago, it is reasonable to assume that some of these were actually circulated amongst the subscribers.

In 1829 the editor of the *Rutland Herald*, had fitted up a reading room at his printing office (just south of Hull Maynard's Insurance Office). The subscription was one dollar per quarter.

However, by 1886 these organizations had likely passed from the scene. That January, at the suggestion of Mrs. P.R. Kendall, 63 women met with Miss Mary Daniels to devise a plan to establish a library. Rutland's poet laureate, Julia C.R. Dorr, was made chairwoman, and at length, it was decided to give an entertainment in order to raise funds for the project.

The next week another meeting was held at Mrs. Allen's on North Main Street at which time the group numbered over one hundred persons. Temporary officers were named, and plans were underway to present a loan exhibition.

The exhibit, which ran from 9 to 12 February 1886, consisted of five rooms of items displayed at the Clement Bank. Many people loaned historical and interesting articles and various orchestras provided the entertainment. The event, a huge success, grossed \$517.87 and netted a little over \$300 after expenses. This amount, plus a few pledges and a number of donated books, was the beginning of the Rutland Free Library Association, which was officially established on 20 February 1886. Seventy-two women signed the articles of confederation and elected the following officers: President, Mrs. Julia C.R. Dorr; vice president, Mrs. George Beaman; secretary, Miss Kate Strong; treasurer, Mrs. John Crampton; and directors, Mrs. H.H. Baxter, Mrs. W.A. Patrick, Mrs. L.W. Redington, Mrs. Henry Clark, Mrs. L.G. Kingsley and Miss Mary Daniels.

The first books were purchased in April and on 5 July 1886 the library, with a total of 3,234 books on the shelves, officially opened for business in the upstairs of a building on Merchants Row. A well-attended reception marked the opening. Under the direction of Miss Julia Humphrey, librarian, 72 cards were issued that first month and by the fourth week 91 books were being loaned daily. A total of 20,283 volumes were circulated during the first year. The library was open daily

from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., from 3 to 6 p.m. and on Saturday evenings from 7 to 9. A person could borrow only one book at a time for a maximum of 14 days; the fine for overdue books was two cents per day.

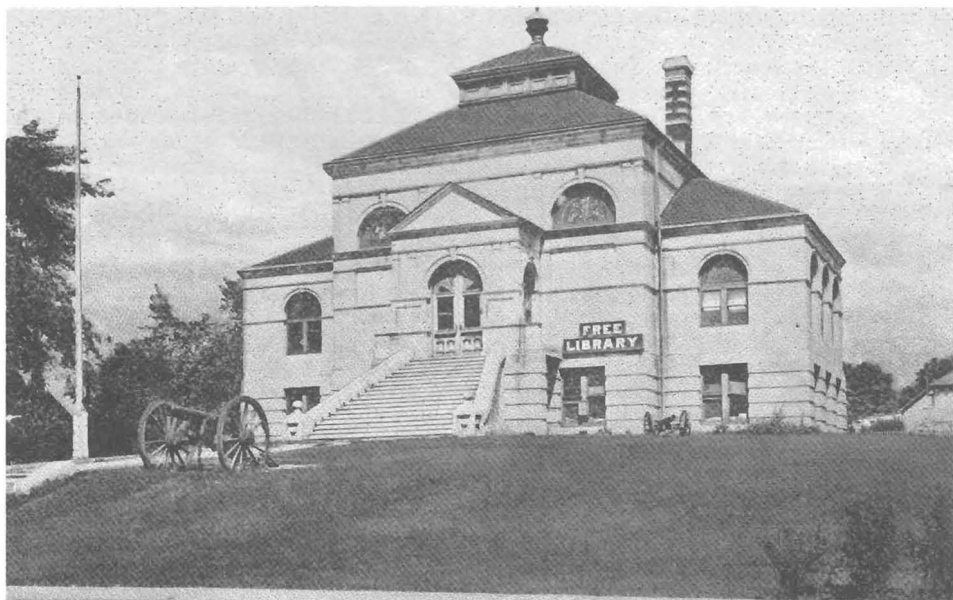
The library was off to a good start. When Miss Humphrey gave her report for the first year of operation she closed with the following statement:

If you heard what comes to the ears of the librarian, of the blessings these books are to poor people, of the mothers who can keep their boys at home now they have a good story to read, of invalids who don't know how they could have borne their affliction except for this library, — you might feel an abundant assurance that your work has not returned unto you desolate. (1)

At the March 1887 town meeting the voters appropriated a liberal tax for the support of the library. The following March the library was offered the lower floor of Memorial Hall. The association gratefully accepted and the move was made in March 1889, after alterations had been completed.

After a quarter of a century at Memorial Hall the association noted the need for expansion. Particular interest was focused on the youth and it was felt that a children's room would be a worthwhile addition. However, the library remained at these quarters for nearly two more decades.

In December 1930 the library was asked to vacate Memorial Hall, which was being torn down and replaced with the present Post Office/Federal Building on West Street. The federal government and the city of Rutland made a property swap. The federal government was to get the land where Memorial Hall stood for its new building and the city was to acquire the old Post Office/ Federal Building at the corner of Court and Center Streets. At the same time it was agreed that the library would occupy the old federal building.



Rutland Free Library

Memorial Hall on West Street, the home of the Rutland Free Library from 1889-1930.

Since the library was to be out of Memorial Hall within two weeks, temporary quarters had to be found. The move was made to one room in the Longfellow School Building which became a repository for 30,000 books. Historical artifacts were removed from Memorial Hall and placed in private homes. The stained glass windows and memorial tablets, upon which were inscribed lines written by Julia Dorr, were given to the library association. (At least one of the windows has been preserved and is owned by the Rutland Historical Society.)

Little did the association realize that it would be nearly five long years before the library moved from its cramped room into its new quarters. Since the library had no money for renovations, it asked voters for the funds, but the citizens of Rutland were in no hurry to allocate appropriations for remodelling the old federal building.

In 1933 the library association was getting desperate and published a pamphlet asking for a yes vote for funds at the town meeting in September. The cost of the alterations would total \$30,000 and charges would be under the control of the Board of Alderman's library committee. If the application were approved, the government would contribute \$9,000; the city's share would be \$21,000. "The carrying charges on these bonds on a twenty year basis, would be around \$1500 a year, and should not affect the tax rate." (2) The people voted yes.

The federal building, which was to house the library, was then nearly 72 years old. Its history dates back to 1856 when land at the northeast corner of the new Center and Court Streets was chosen for its site. Plans were exhibited at George Tuttle's Bookstore in February 1857 and construction began that spring, ending in the winter of 1858/9. The cost was \$56,000. (An identical structure, the federal building in Windsor, was also designed by Young.) *The History of Rutland County*, published in 1886, gives additional details:

The supervising architect was the well-known government architect who built the Vermont State House, Ami (sic) B. Young; J.J.R. Randall, architect of Rutland, was superintendent of construction and disbursing agent. The contractors were B.F. Colby and Mr. Bird. The building is fire-proof, constructed of Boston pressed brick and iron, with the foundation and underpinning of Vermont granite. The roof was originally covered with galvanized iron, but this was replaced about ten years ago by a roof of copper. The basement was intended for a United States prison, and a number of cells were built for the accommodation of United States prisoners, but only one person has ever been confined in any of them, and he only for a day and night.

The appropriation for the erection of this building was obtained through the instrumentality of the Hon. Solomon Foot, who at his death bequeathed his splendid library to be kept in the building. It now fills the north end of the second story. (3)

It might be mentioned that when Senator Foot died in Washington D.C., his remains were brought back to Rutland to be interred in Evergreen Cemetery. The funeral train arrived in Rutland at the depot and was escorted to the federal building by four white horses, adorned with white plumes attached to their heads. Foot's body lay in state on 31 March 1866 in the courtroom (presently the Nella Grimm Fox Room of the library).

The Aldermanic Committee, comprised of Henry H. Branchaud, Chairman Thomas W. McMinn and Charles T. Quigley, worked closely with representatives Walter F. Burbank and Miss Ellen B. Crampton to secure a plan for renovations. Arthur H. Smith was hired as architect. In December 1933 the aldermen learned that, without their knowledge, the judge's bench and four sets of seats had been removed from the courtroom leaving gaping holes in the floor. The seats had been

sold to the Rutland Fair Association for \$10 and the bench was being used in an office of the new federal building. The superintendent of public buildings in Washington had ordered that these furnishings be disposed of. The aldermen were incensed, since the deed to the property included the appurtenances in the building.

On 1 August 1935 the renovations were completed. All the books were brought from the school and deposited in one large room at the library, where two months of classifying and arranging followed.

An article, most likely written by Cynthia M. Gorton, who served as librarian from 1926 to 1943, described the interior after the move was made:

On the main floor there is an inviting entrance which looks on the mezzanine and gives a spacious appearance. In back of the stacks are study tables, but with good observation from the desk. Students enjoy this privilege as well as others who have papers to write.

The large reading room, with long windows and plenty of them, affords a pleasant place to while away many hours. One section is used for newspapers.

The Children's Room has a fireplace, plenty of chairs and tables with small chairs and a table for young children. Two large cases for exhibits are here temporarily, which now contain about 100 dolls of various description, size and country. There is a separate entrance for children which will be used only in summer.

The Vermont Room on the second floor is one of the pleasantest rooms. It is on the southeast corner and very sunny. We have a large mahogany table and some antique chairs.

The large auditorium which is on the second floor, and was a courtroom, is reserved by the city, but we have the privilege of using it for meetings and exhibits. Next month we may have an art exhibit. Later the Garden Club will have their annual party.

The third floor is used for bound magazines, seldom called for, and for storage.

When planning a library one learns many things. Lighting for instance. We finally decided on the hollaphane globes. We find them very satisfactory. It is semi-indirect. (In 1954 fluorescent lighting was installed.) Also have a dumbwaiter, if possible. It helps so much. Fireplaces are pretty but not essential. Then we do have an office. Not just a space in back of the desk, but a private room. We have a nice one. Plenty of shelving, running water, tables, etc. If one can overlook the desk from this room, it helps when assistance is needed.

But what to do about furniture we did not know. When Mrs. Burditt, who for years was librarian, and then later president of the Association, died, a most fitting memorial to her was to start this Furniture Fund and we soon had the amount needed. It is good substantial furniture, golden oak, some round and some oblong. Windsor chairs in reading room and straight chairs for.... (4)

Vermont author Dorothy Canfield Fisher of Arlington was guest speaker at the annual meeting of the library association in 1937. At that time it was reported that



Allen Baker

Cynthia Minnie Gorton, Director of the Rutland Free Library from 1926-1943. In 1946, Minnie Gorton married George Hunt, local florist.

84,955 volumes had been loaned the previous year. By 1939 the library set a new record — the circulation had reached the 100,000 mark. In 1959 it was over 150,000 and presently remains about the same.

In 1944 the library opened a self-service “branch”. Since it was difficult for some people to get to the library, a book-lined shelf was placed behind the counter at James A. Reardon’s store at 101 River Street.

According to a 1949 article detailing the library’s use, “One of the most popular new books is *Dinner at Antoine’s* by Frances Parkinson Keyes with 48 names on reserve at the present time. The library has five copies of the novel, and reports that there never has been such a demand for any book.” (5) Others high on the reading list were *The Young Lions* by Irwin Shaw, *The Naked and the Dead* by Norman Mailer and *Cheaper by the Dozen* by Frank Gilbreth, Jr. It was also reported that women borrowed more books than men.

At that time the library had set its budget request at \$24,500 for 1950, but Mayor Dan Healy cut it to \$17,900. In December Librarian Carl Hull took immediate measures to reduce spending. “Discontinuance of the Saturday shows, attended by hundreds of children, is the first step in curtailment of the library’s services to the public made necessary by drastic cuts in the library budget for 1950”, Hull said. (6) These films were restored in March 1950 “following the affirmative vote Tuesday for the three cent library tax”.

When the library moved into the federal building in 1935, no one envisioned that one day it would outgrow those 10 spacious rooms, but by 1960 the trustees were calling for an addition. The following year they engaged Rutland architect Payson R. Webber to draw up plans and to obtain quotes for construction of a one-story addition. The new section, to be erected on the east side of the building, would include an adult reading room and enlargement of the reference and children’s rooms. However, the bond issue was voted down. In 1964 Edwin

Lawrence, who had recently given the city a recreation center located across Center Street from the library, made a \$30,000 donation to the association. This money, library funds and a federal grant financed the new addition.

In August 1965 the John Russell Corporation submitted the lowest bid. After some finagling the trustees engaged the corporation to build the addition at a cost of \$109,114. It was completed in 1966. Two years later it was decided to sandblast the buff-colored paint from the brick exterior of the original building so that it would blend with the new brick section.

The only vestiges that remain from the bygone days of the courthouse are the jail cells and the hitching posts. During Prohibition federal agents used the cells as a storage area for confiscated liquor. It seems at one time there was a jail break, for someone helped himself to the illegal spirits. The four hitching posts, two located on Center Street, stand as a reminder of the horse and buggy days. It is said that the last time anyone used them was about 1935 when a man from Whitehall, New York, hitched his horse and wagon there while he peddled his honey to downtown customers.

The library building has always been a focal point of the community. In its early years it was the scene of courtroom trials and of people coming to pick up their



Rutland Free Library

Nella Grimm Fox who bequeathed funds in trust in 1969 to support the library. The meeting room on the second floor is named in her memory.

mail. Today it is a focal point of a different kind: offering reading material, records, microfilm, as well as entertainment usually staged in the Nella Grimm Fox Room. Book reviews, special displays, art exhibits, story hours, lectures, and musical offerings have been held regularly at the library. Today, this architecturally prominent building stands as the cultural center of this community.

JULIA CAROLINE RIPLEY DORR

Soon after the Rutland Free Library opened its doors in 1886 the *Rutland Herald* featured an article chronicling the event. In refuting the impression that Rutland was not a literary community the writer states: "Certainly it [Rutland] has a good proportion of liberally educated men and women, numerous able speakers and writers and at least one author of national reputation." (7) Without a doubt the author referred to was none other than Rutland's poet laureate Julia C.R. Dorr.

On 13 February 1825 Julia was born in Charleston, South Carolina, to a Vermont father and a mother of French extraction, who died within two years. After a stint in New York, Julia's father remarried and resided in his native Middlebury for a time, but in 1837 he removed to Rutland where he was engaged in the mercantile business. The previous year he purchased the Thomas Page property (presently J.A. Moran) in Center Rutland where the family made its home for many years. Thus, Julia was reared and educated in the Green Mountains.

On 22 February 1847, shortly after her twenty-second birthday, Julia was married at Rutland to Seneca M. Dorr, who afterwards became a prominent legislator. A year later, Julia published her first piece, although she had been writing verses since the age of twelve. From that time on her poems and stories were printed in the leading periodicals of the day. Her first book, *Farmingdale*, was published under the *non de plume* of Caroline Thomas (taken from her and her mother's middle name and her mother's surname), although succeeding works bore her real name. Through the years she became a noted author, excelling in poetry and, later, travelogues.

In 1859 her father sold her husband four and a half acres on what is presently known as Dorr Drive. It was on this site that the Dorr's stately home, "The Maples", was erected. Surrounded by flower gardens and a commanding view of Otter Creek and the mountains beyond, Julia made her home in this idyllic setting.

After Julia's four children were grown, she had time for civic pursuits. In 1880 she was persuaded to become president of the fledgling Fortnightly Club, an office she held for 30 years. To this day, in honor of their early president, the club opens its meetings with a selection for her works.

When 72 women founded the Rutland Free Library Association in 1886, Julia was named as its first president. The association held its 25th anniversary meeting in 1911, at which time the following letter from Mrs. Dorr was read:

Ladies of the Library Association:

My Dear Friends—

I find it hard to realize that we are about to keep our twenty-fifth anniversary. A quarter of a century seemed a long way off to a band of sixty-three women who met one wintry afternoon in Miss Daniel's hospitable parlor, and resolved then and there, that Rutland should have a Free Public Library. As memory recalls that never-to-be-forgotten day, I am astonished to see how many of that eager group have passed beyond the hearing of any earthly roll call.



Rutland Free Library

Julia C. R. Dorr

Julia Caroline Ripley Dorr, first president of the Rutland Free Library Association.

But this is no time for sad retrospection. They have ceased from their labors, and their works do follow them. God bless them where-so-ever in this great universe they are today!

This library sprang into being as a seed germinates in soil that has long been waiting to receive it. It has made its own way, found its own place, and done its own work. That it could have done more and better work if amply endowed goes without saying. Perhaps some loyal son of Rutland will come to the front some day, and do for its institutions an iota of what has been done for our sister city, Burlington, by her sons. Why not? And who knows? Let us hope for the best, and take courage.

Our library has been especially favored in its librarians, from the very first. In its twenty-five years it has had but three — Miss Humphrey, Miss Titcomb and Miss Cheney — all scholarly women of unusual ability, unflinching patience and great sagacity, women who not only loved their work, but gloried in it. Mere money can never repay the debt this town owes them.

Pardon one personal word. It is long since I have been able to attend one of your annual meetings. In fact, it is many years since I have been in Vermont in the winter. But I have never lost interest in your library, never faltered in my allegiance to it. I am proud that I was your first president, and I love to recall the days when I was actively associated with you and an equal sharer in your work.

Although the passing years have dimmed the magnitude of her success and few people now read her works, at that period of time she was a celebrated personality. Other towns had famous politicians, buildings, battle monuments or other claims to fame, but Rutland had Julia Dorr. The people of Rutland were proud of her talent, honored her with respect and cherished the association that many had made with Mrs. Dorr.

On 18 January 1913 Mrs. Dorr passed away, but her legacy of literary accomplishment and community contributions lingers on. It was her hope, and that of many others, that the new library would become a solid institution for Rutland. As one writer put it, "It may not attract so much attention as the triumphs of the tournaments, but it belittles them all in the true glory that it will slowly and silently but surely bring to the community." (9)

Footnotes

1. *Rutland Daily Herald*, February 17, 1911
2. "How Long Shall Rutland Suffer for Lack of a Proper Library Building?" Leaflet published by Friends of the Library, 1933
3. H.P. Smith and W.S. Rann, eds., *History of Rutland County, Vermont*, (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason & Co., 1886), p. 148
4. Rutland Free Library, anonymous, unpublished article, ca. 1935
5. *Rutland Daily Herald*, March 2, 1949
6. *Rutland Daily Herald*, December 21, 1949
7. *Rutland Daily Herald*, July 8, 1886
8. *Rutland Daily Herald*, February 11, 1911
9. *Rutland Daily Herald*, July 1, 1886

Dawn Hance is a regular contributor to the Rutland Historical Society Quarterly. She edited the James Davie Butler's *Rutlandia*, Vol. XIV, Nos. 3 and 4, and *The Early Militia in Rutland*, Vol. XIV, No. 2.



Rutland Free Library

Charles D. Maurer, current Director of the Rutland Free Library since 1963.

Librarians of the Rutland Free Library

Julia P. Humphrey	1886-1889
Mary L. Titcomb	1889-1899
Lucy Cheney Burditt	1899-1925
Mrs. Herbert A. Durgy	1925-1926
Miss Cynthia M. Gorton	1926-1943
Marion Humble	1943-1948
Carl W. Hull	1949-1951
Leonard Archer	1951-1958
John T. Osborne	1959-1960
Robert J. Thomas	1960-1963
Charles D. Maurer	1963 to present

**RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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The Rutland Historical Society was founded in 1969 to preserve, study and disseminate the history of the original Town of Rutland as chartered by New Hampshire Governor Benning Wentworth in 1761, now comprised of the City of Rutland (1892) and the Towns of Rutland (1761), Proctor (1886) and West Rutland (1886). The Society maintains and operates The Rutland Museum in the historic Bank of Rutland building built in 1825, now owned by the City of Rutland, and The Vermont Farm and Rural Life Museum at the Vermont State Fair. A research library and the historical collections are maintained in the Museums and the historic Nickwackett Fire Station. Gifts or bequests of articles of historical interest or money are welcome at all times and are deductible for income tax purposes.

Membership in the Society is open to all upon payment of appropriate dues. (See the dues schedule below.) With membership, for its period, go a subscription to the Quarterly, any newsletters, a copy of the Annual Report, entitlement to vote at business meetings, and benefits accruing from support of the Society's Museums, exhibits, programs, collections and library. The year through which membership is paid and the category are noted on all address labels.

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RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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